

Dimock, PA
November 29, 2011

Issue: On Nov. 30, Cabot Inc. will stop delivering water to 12 homes in Dimock, PA which have private wells contaminated with methane caused by Cabot drilling activities. In response to this deadline, home owners and numerous other concerned citizens contacted EPA asking Region 3 to examine data from wells. In cooperation with PADEP, EPA and ATSDR visited the Dimock area homes on Nov. 10 and were provided a very large amount of inconsistent and disorganized well sampling data.

Based on the home visits and preliminary review of data, EPA has concerns about several issues: the reliability of methane removal systems; the presence of other contaminants (metals, volatile organics, non-naturally occurring organics) besides methane for which the systems are not designed or in place to address; and homes/wells in Dimock that may have never been tested and may be contaminated.

However, thus far EPA has not reviewed any data which would cause us to act under imminent and substantial endangerment authority under the Safe Drinking Water Act. Nevertheless, EPA and ATSDR have great concern about the consistency and quality of the data and need additional time to review the data and to determine any potential health impacts.

EPA raised our concerns to PADEP via email on Nov. 25, but have not received any formal response. EPA is considering asking PADEP to extend the water delivery deadline due to the unreliability of the treatment systems based on our review of post treatment installation data. EPA believes that there is no current reliable remedy to well owners. EPA believes that the systems should be National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) certified and/or installed/maintained by a certified, independent, third party.

Background: Cabot begun drilling in the Dimock area in 2008 and Methane contamination was detected soon after. After first calling for provision of public water, which the State Public Utility Commission vetoed based on cost, PADEP issued a consent agreement with Cabot for methane and metals removal systems for 18 wells. The agreement calls for each well owner to enter into the agreement with Cabot. Until the treatment systems are installed, Cabot was to provide delivered water.

There are 18 wells that are part of the PADEP/Cabot agreement. Six well owners have signed agreements and have systems installed. However, most of them are buying water because they have no confidence that the systems are working. Twelve well owners have not signed the agreement and are part of a civil suit. These 12 are currently being provided water, which will cease on Nov. 30. Other wells not part of agreement may be contaminated.

PADEP approved the stoppage of water delivery on Nov. 30 on the grounds that Cabot has allowed sufficient time for residents to sign the agreement and that a remedy for home owners has been provided.